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6-1983

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## **NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF THE LOWER NIOBRARA VALLEY IN 1902 AS RECORDED BY MYRON H. SWENK**

An expedition consisting of Messrs. J.C. Crawford, Jr., W.D. Pierce, and myself, was sent out by the Department of Entomology and Ornithology of the University of Nebraska during the summer of 1902, into the lower Niobrara valley in order to examine and collect specimens of the fauna of that region. After August 1, Professor Bruner also worked with us. Although essentially an entomological expedition, considerable attention was paid by different members of the party to the birds, and some fairly interesting and valuable ornithological notes were secured.

The party started from Long Pine on June 14, and proceeded down the river by boat, arriving at the town of Niobrara August 9, from which place it returned to Lincoln. A stop of two weeks was made at Springview Bridge<sup>1</sup>, and of one month at Carns, in order to closely examine the fauna of that region. The other two weeks were spent between Carns and Niobrara along the river.

Before entering into a detailed consideration of the birds to be found in this one hundred miles of river valley, it might be well to glance briefly at the general configuration of the country. At our place of starting the impression was decidedly western. The gently sloping, pine dotted sides of Long Pine Canyon runs off to the south, cradling the cool, transparent waters of Long Pine Creek — a last dying trace of the eastern foothills — while to the north arises the rugged hills of Keya Paha County, cut with numerous deep canyons and covered with an ample growth of yellow pine. Back of these hills the country broadens out into great treeless prairies, and finally into the vast sandhills themselves.

As we proceed eastward the character of the country gradually changes. The rugged surface outlines soften, the steep, shaly river banks caused by the eroded hills become less and less steep, and finally melt away altogether, while the rough hills and canyons back from the river modulate into gentle undulations. When we reach the western border of Holt County the pines and cacti are left behind, the prairies begin to assume a greenish hue, and an occasional cornfield in a moist valley betokens the advent of farming land. After passing the northern bend and again turning to the south, the river country is predominated by the eastern characteristics, until by the time we reach the Missouri we are on genuine prairie land.

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1. At that time the Ainsworth Springview road crossed the Niobrara on a bridge at Meadville, about 5 mi. upstream from the present US 183 bridge. The Bassett-Springview road crossed on a bridge at Carns. The "Springview Bridge" apparently was the one at Meadville. — Ed.

Even the character of the river itself changes, and from a broad, shallow stream studded with sandbars and dissipating its current in a myriad of little streamlets, it concentrates into a deep and narrow stream of great swiftness. The vegetation in the immediate vicinity of the river also undergoes a change, but more of a change in degree than in kind, for the narrow belt of Cottonwood and Bur Oaks broadens into timber of considerable size, while the underbrush of Black and Diamond Willows, Shoestring, Buffalo Berry, Choke Cherry, Wild Plum, and similar thicket plants becomes denser as we proceed on.

With the decided transition of conditions it is natural to expect a merging of eastern and western avifaunas, and that is exactly what occurs. We were in many cases enabled to exactly determine the ranges of some of our birds in our state along its northern line. The following briefly annotated list includes all of the species observed by the expedition.

1. Great Blue Heron. A single bird seen on a bar between Pishelville and Verdigris Creek, August 9.
2. Green-backed Heron. Common along the river from Carns where it was first observed on August 1, eastward to Niobrara.
3. Northern Shoveler. A flock of ten, seven females and three males, flew by our camp at Carns, July 1. On the next day what was in all probability the same flock, alit on a sandbar opposite our camp to rest and sleep. Mr. Crawford attempted to get a specimen, but the birds were too wary for that, although the identification was made undoubtable.
4. Hooded Merganser. A female identified between Springview Bridge and Carns, June 25.
5. Turkey Vulture. This vulture was quite common in the bluffs and canyons between Springview and the river, and several were noted each day while encamped near the bridge, as they circled about in the adjacent hills. At Carns it was less common, being noted only once, two birds on a sandbar July 12. Reported to us as breeding in Long Pine Canyon.
6. Northern Harrier. Noted twice at Carns, July 5 and 23.
7. Cooper's Hawk. Near Simpson, August 1, one bird seen.
8. Swainson's Hawk. Thoroughly identified a male at Carns, August 1.
9. Red-tailed Hawk. At Niobrara August 13, a large Redtail was heard screaming as it circled about over the river.
10. Ferruginous Hawk. A pair were frequently noted in the canyons near Springview Bridge, where they evidently were nesting. Another bird was seen in a canyon ten miles northwest of Carns, July 6.
11. American Kestrel. Not uncommon all along the valley. A pair found breeding at Carns July 23. Also seen at Long Pine June 15, at Springview June 22, and a pair at Grand Rapids, August 4.
12. Merlin. One seen on evening of August 6.
13. Peregrine Falcon. Not far from Badger, on August 6 we saw a Peregrine Falcon sailing about over the river.
14. Greater Prairie Chicken. Quite common on the hills near the river. The Sharp-tailed Grouse was not noted, but was reported as occurring by the ranchers.
15. Northern Bobwhite. Abundant throughout the Niobrara valley. Young of the second brood noted July 20.
16. American Coot. One seen between Redbird Creek and Pishelville, August 8.
17. Belted Piping Plover. This little plover was first noted on a large sandbar, cut by many streamlets, .5 mile long and 1 block wide, near Springview Bridge June 17. In the midst of a flock of Killdeer I noticed four of these pale plover, who for some reason would turn against their larger cousins and invariably drive them back. As I approached they flew away to another part of the bar, leaving the Killdeer alone. I secured two, a male and a female, and on dissection found in the ovary of the female an egg just forming in the shell. Three days later on revisiting the bar a single plover was seen feeding in the shallows. He would wade up to the full depth of his legs before taking wing, and then with a "tootle-ee-ee" off he would skim to another part of the bar. Then on alighting, he would stretch out his wings, "teeter", and run ahead, a short distance at a time. Occasionally he would utter the peculiar melancholy "tu-whee" of the species. On the 21st I made another thorough search and succeeded in finding the nest, a mere excavation in the sand lined with fine pointed pebbles, and placed on the highest point of the bar. It contained a single egg, quite similar to that of the Killdeer but smaller and rather lighter and less speckled. As long as I was near the nest the parent bird always kept quite a distance away, but no sooner would I retreat a short distance than she would hasten back to it, and then, satisfied that no harm had

been done, fly away again and apparently commence to feed. On June 23 it contained two eggs, on the 24, three. Never on approaching the nest did I find the old bird near it, but always in sight on the edge of the bar. June 25 we returned expecting to get the eggs and a photograph, but the eggs had been removed, and a most thorough search of the bar failed to reveal them, though the old bird was feeding as usual. No more nests were found, but the birds were noted commonly throughout the trip.

18. Killdeer. Common summer resident and breeder all along the river.

19. Greater Yellowlegs. On the evening of July 1 we were surprised to hear the familiar call of this bird, as a pair flew by our camp at Carns. Another pair was seen on a bar between Carns and Simpson August 2, among a flock of smaller species.

20. Lesser Yellowlegs. Occasional small flocks were noted during August.

21. Solitary Sandpiper. A female was secured at Carns July 7, and a pair seen on the same bar both July 21 and 22. They were in all cases very shy, flushing at a great distance.

22. Willet. While collecting in some willows along the river at Carns on July 7, I heard a strange guttural call, and peering out saw a large shorebird on a sandbar. On shooting it, it proved to be a fine male of this species.

23. Spotted Sandpiper. Abundant all along the river where they doubtless bred quite commonly. A young one in natal down was picked up on a bar near Badger, August 6. The little fellow could swim rapidly and easily in deep water, and when released he unconcernedly resumed his "teetering" and search for food.

24. Upland Sandpiper. Noted June 21 on a hay flat near Springview by Messrs. Crawford and Pierce, where it was evidently nesting. A great many heard migrating August 13 at Niobrara.

25. Semipalmated Sandpiper. Simpson, August 5, a flock of five.

26. Least Sandpiper. A pair seen at Carns July 7, and one taken July 10. This species was present on ponds as well as along the river, three being noted on a small pond near Basset July 19, one at Simpson August 1, and a pair near Butte August 5. All along the river it was very common in small flocks during August.

27. White-rumped Sandpiper. A female with minute forming eggs shot on a bar at Springview Bridge, June 21.

28. Baird's Sandpiper. A flock of twenty or so noted at Carns July 20, and another of probably forty birds July 22, out of which a female was shot. From this date on, flocks of varying size were noted all along the river, an especially large one August 2 which must have numbered a hundred birds.

29. Pectoral Sandpiper. Not common. A pair seen at Carns July 21, and again on the 22nd among a flock of Baird's.

30. Franklin's Gull. One adult male specimen seen and taken on a sandbar near Badger, August 4.

31. Ring-billed Gull. Noted but once, on July 1 when a single bird came flying up the river near our camp at Carns. Being quite near it was identified thoroughly.

32. Forster's Tern. A large tern with little doubt this species noted August 8 near the mouth of Redbird Creek.

33. Least Tern. The Least Tern was not observed until on August 4, when a few miles west of Badger we met with a flock of eight or nine flying about over the shallows. One male specimen was secured. From this point on to Niobrara it was very common, being noted every day, and every large bar was certain to have several of the little fellows hovering about, uttering their harsh, squeaky notes as they plunged into the shallows or chased each other about in the air. On one occasion one was seen flying straight towards a large bar with food in its mouth. Although lack of time prevented any stopping to search for nests, I have little doubt but that it breeds commonly on the large bars in that locality.

34. Black Tern. A flock of about a dozen was noted flying over our camp at Carns on the evening of June 29; and a single bird was seen flying low over a hay meadow near Carns on July 28.

35. Mourning Dove. Abundant throughout the valley.

36. Black-billed Cuckoo. Uncommon. Identified twice, at a point between Plum Creek and Springview Bridge on June 18, and at Carns July 9.

37. Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Abundant all along the river, breeding commonly.

38. Common Barn Owl. A pair seen peering out of a large hole in a clay bank along the river at Grand Rapids, August 4.

39. Eastern Screech Owl. Very common throughout the valley. Quite abundant near our camp at Simpson, and kept its weird calling during a whole afternoon.

40. Burrowing Owl. Not so common as might be expected. Two towns were reported to us within ten miles of Carns, and on July 20 the larger one was visited, and found to contain about ten pairs. None were observed about the numerous prairie dog towns in that region.

41. Short-eared Owl. A single bird kept flying about our camp at Niobrara on the evening of August 10.

42. Common Nighthawk. Both forms of the Nighthawk were found commonly throughout the valley, gathering together in the evening and on cloudy days over their favorite feeding grounds — the numerous sloughs along the river. On June 20, two birds were shot at Springview Bridge, a male of the Sennett and a female of the eastern form. At Carns a male of the eastern form was shot June 30, and a male Sennett and a female eastern July 23. As far as our field observations went, the two forms were about equally abundant.

The first genuine flocking was observed on the evening of July 23, when numerous loose, scattering flocks were noted flying up the river. These continued to grow gradually in size, until by August 1 they were enormous. On that date a flock was observed at Simpson that filled the air all over the river, hundreds of them feeding on the immense flocks of mosquitoes and winged ants. These flocks of birds would appear about four o'clock and last until after dark, and evidently contained all the birds for miles around. Where they were in the daytime we could not ascertain, but it was probably in the surrounding hills.

43. Common Poorwill. Mr. Crawford found this bird common in a canyon several miles northwest of Carns, July 6, and heard it calling at night. None were observed in the immediate vicinity of the river.

44. Chimney Swift. Not observed until we came to Niobrara, where it was abundant about the town August 10-13.

45. Belted Kingfisher. Very common in the whole river region, breeding in the clay banks.

46. Red-headed Woodpecker. Observed first at Carns, July 6, a pair along a fence. It increased steadily in commonness as we went eastward until at Niobrara it was very numerous.

47. Downy Woodpecker. We almost entirely missed this familiar little woodpecker in the Niobrara region. We noted a pair and heard them drumming in a cottonwood grove near Springview Bridge on June 16. We saw but one or two afterward, until in the immediate vicinity of Niobrara, where it was fairly common.

48. Hairy Woodpecker. In the little canyons running back from the river we found the Hairy Woodpecker quite at home, and almost as common as the Downy is in the east, which bird it apparently replaces here. It was about equally common throughout the valley.

49. Northern Flicker.

Yellow-shafted Flicker. The Yellow-shafted Flicker was abundant in the valley as far west as we went.

Red-shafted Flicker. Contrary to our expectations this species was quite uncommon in this region, being observed but once on the entire trip. A female was seen on a dead stub June 22 at Springview Bridge and secured. It showed good evidence of being a setting bird, but a search of the excavations in the stub failed to reveal any eggs.

50. Say's Phoebe. Abundant. First nest with young found at Springview Bridge, June 18.

51. Great Crested Flycatcher. Mr. Crawford and I thoroughly identified a Great Crested Flycatcher near Springview Bridge, June 18.

52. Western Kingbird. Uncommon. A pair noted on a fence at Carns July 19 and again on July 28. At Niobrara, August 14, we saw a pair with four fully grown young, along the railroad.

53. Eastern Kingbird. A very abundant and characteristic bird of the entire region, where it bred in great numbers.

54. Horned Lark. Probably the most abundant bird in the whole region is the Desert Horned Lark, or "Stormbird" as it is locally called. The plateaus away from the river and canyons are its favorite localities and there it breeds abundantly. About Long Pine and Springview it was especially numerous. Nests with one to three fresh eggs were found June 21, and this a second setting, for birds in juvenal plumage were common. They were almost unusually tame, and would barely move out of one's way when approached.

55. Tree Swallow. Quite a number of these swallows were noted, and several secured on the telephone wires near Carns, July 1 and 2.

56. Northern Rough-winged Swallow. Abundant all along the river, and breeding commonly in the clay banks. This species is apparently the only banknesting swallow in the region, no Bank Swallows being noted on the trip. June 16, we found a nest of this bird containing young in a clay bank near our camp at Springview Bridge. On the next evening Mr. Crawford caught one of the old birds on the nest and brought it to camp. On being liberated again, it flew at once for its nest and young. A number of other nests were found along the river, notably a considerable colony nine miles below Badger, but none were disturbed.

57. Barn Swallow. Abundant, breeding throughout. A newly finished nest found under Springview Bridge, June 15 which contained four eggs June 21. One barn at Carns contained about a dozen nesting pair.

58. Blue Jay. Abundant and breeding everywhere.

59. American Crow. The Crow was common and evidently breeding as far west as we went along the river, but westward it was confined to the river valley, venturing but very rarely out on the surrounding plateaus.

60. Black-capped Chickadee. This form entirely occupies the valley, and is abundant locally throughout.

61. House Wren. Very common breeder, both in woods and about the houses.

62. Eastern Bluebird. Noted by Mr. Pierce in Long Pine canyon June 13.

63. Wood Thrush. We noted two individuals at Winfield in Long Pine canyon June 20, one being a bird on a nest containing three fresh eggs. Not noted elsewhere.

64. American Robin. Fairly common all along the valley, but decidedly more so eastward.

65. Gray Catbird. Common in the shrubbery, more so eastward.

66. Brown Thrasher. Common eastward and few westward, breeding throughout.

67. Loggerhead Shrike. Observed by Mr. Crawford in Keya Paha County June 16, and by myself at Butte August 5.

68. Bell's Vireo. Very common all along the valley. Found with young at Carns June 28.

69. Warbling Vireo. Heard once at Carns June 27.

70. Red-eyed Vireo. Common, breeding. First pair noted at Springview Bridge June 16.

71. Yellow Warbler. Common and breeding.

72. Black-and-white Warbler. About the first bird we noted upon our arrival at Springview Bridge was this one. A pair kept flying in and out of a patch of shrubbery near our tent carrying nesting material, but before their home was finished we had to leave. Two other pairs were noted not far from there. At Carns, too, it was common, and on July 10 a pair with young was found. None were observed toward the eastern end of our trip. They did not sing much, but were content with an occasional "tsip" or an outburst of their rather weak song at long intervals.

73. American Redstart. Common. A pair was noted by Mr. Crawford building a nest near Springview Bridge, June 17. It was very common in Long Pine canyon June 20. No eggs or young found.

74. Common Yellowthroat. Abundant among the willows on the islands and banks, from which its "wichity-wichity" came incessantly.

75. Yellow-breasted Chat. This form of chat occupies at least the greater part of the Niobrara valley. It is abundant westward, but only common eastward.

76. Scarlet Tanager. Observed once. A female thoroughly with the binoculars at the mouth of Verdigris Creek, August 9.

77. Black-headed Grosbeak. The Black-headed Grosbeak was very common at Springview Bridge and on to Carns, but east of that place none were observed, neither was it replaced in the valley by the Rose-breasted but rather by the Blue. On June 16, Mr. Crawford observed a pair nestbuilding in the canyons near the river, and on June 20 we found a pair with a newly finished nest in Long Pine canyon, at Winfield<sup>2</sup>. The nest was in a scrub oak about ten feet up, and its structure of loosely arranged stems resembled very closely that of the Rose-breasted. In fact, the habits of the bird are all very similar to those of the Rose-breasted, and its sparrowy "chink" and robinlike song are practically the same as in that species. It has however, another note, an inquiring "w-hee-oo" that I have never heard the Rose-breasted utter, and it is rather more noisy and demonstrative. Many were seen feeding on a large green caterpillar, and the stomachs of three specimens shot contained a large amount of them.

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2. About 2.5 mi. south and 1 mi. west of the northeast corner of Brown County, near the present Pine Glen WMA. — Ed.

78. Blue Grosbeak. Carns was our westernmost locality for this grosbeak. On the evening of June 29, we saw a pair near our camp there, and what was probably the same pair was again noted July 4 and secured July 5. Several others were noted at different times. As we proceeded eastward the increasing commonness of the bird was quite noticeable, until from Pishelville on it could be considered fairly abundant.

79. Indigo Bunting. At the mouth of Eagle Creek 20 miles east from Badger, we heard our first Indigo Bunting in the shrubbery along the bank. This is, I believe, about its westernmost limit. Two pairs observed along the railroad at Niobrara.

80. Dickcissel. A few Dickcissels were present all along, though their distribution was mostly in isolated pairs, and they were no commoner at Niobrara than at Springview Bridge.

81. Rufous-sided Towhee. This western species occupies the entire valley to the complete exclusion of the eastern race. It is very common throughout, but more especially westward. In the many little canyons about Springview Bridge and Carns it is very abundant, being constantly in sight or hearing. In spite of its abundance but two nests were found, both with young. June 22 we found the first one in the canyons near Springview Bridge. It contained three young birds, about halfgrown, and was placed on the ground under the protecting sprouts of a tree. The composition was entirely of grasses. The old birds showed no unusual excitement as we examined and photographed the nest. The other nest was found at Carns, June 28, and contained young birds ready to fly. We could see no difference in habits between this and the eastern towhee.

82. Field Sparrow. One of the most characteristic and interesting birds of the whole region was the Western Field Sparrow. Abundant throughout but not a bird too many of these charming little vocalists. Untiringly all day long their plaintive trilling song came to us from the surrounding canyons, and even at night some sleepy little songster would join in with the Chats and Screech Owls. Generally shy and retiring, when singing they become so engrossed with their outbursts of joy that they allowed a close approach.

We found a nest June 19, within fifty yards of our tent. While coming down a small canyon the bird flushed from a bush ahead, and peering in, I found the nest with three eggs. I secured the female for exact identification. The nest was composed of sticks for a base, then fine and coarse grass stems, then rootlets, and finally a snug lining of horsehair, probably picked up from a road nearby. A few small leaves were intermixed. It was placed about a foot and a half from the ground, on the overlapping branches of a *Symphoricarpos* bush (sic; *S. albus* is Snowberry, *S. orbiculatus* is Coralberry or Buckbrush). All the while the nest was being photographed and taken, the male remained about, but not uttering a sound. The eggs in this nest were badly advanced in incubation, so that only one was saved and that with difficulty. A nest with young was found at Carns, July 9.

83. Lark Sparrow. So far as we noticed, *Strigatus* is the form of the Niobrara valley. In the west it is abundant, and present everywhere, on the open plateaus, wooded canyons, or on the fences along roads. From Badger eastward it grew decidedly less common. At Carns, June 30, a nest was found with fresh eggs, while other pairs were seen carrying food to their young.

84. Lark Bunting. We found the Lark Bunting very local in its distribution. In a little meadow on the outskirts of the town of Springview, June 22, it was abundant, the one meadow containing probably thirty birds, the males greatly predominating. Aside from this it was observed but once, at Carns July 9, though a great many localities seemingly as inviting were found all along the valley.

85. Grasshopper Sparrow. This bird was abundant on the plateaus back from the river, all along the valley.

86. Song Sparrow. The Song Sparrow was not present in the valley as far as we could tell until within a few miles of Niobrara. Prof. Bruner noted one between that place and Pishelville August 9, and I saw one at Niobrara, August 13. If it occurs westward in the valley it is but rarely.

87. Bobolink. Not common. In a large hay meadow near Carns, July 28, we found a pair of Bobolinks with a brood of fledged young. Quite by accident, we also found the old nest with its domed roof and side entrance, and in spite of its being deserted, the old birds seemed quite excited over our discovery. Mr. Pierce noted several pairs in a field near Badger, August 6.

88. Red-winged Blackbird. Very common in the willows around the sloughs and along the river.

89. Western Meadowlark. Abundant. Fresh eggs at Springview June 20, and at Carns, July 12.

90. Yellow-headed Blackbird. A flock of five seen near Badger, August 6, and a single bird at Niobrara, August 12.

91. Common Grackle. Abundant throughout the valley - breeding.

92. Brown-headed Cowbird. Equally abundant throughout the valley.

93. Orchard Oriole. Common. First observed at Carns, June 27, but was not seen at the Springview Bridge.

94. Northern Oriole.

Baltimore Oriole. Common eastward but very few at Springview Bridge. A male noted there June 17, and two more June 21. Breeding at Carns.

Bullock's Oriole. A fine male identified at Winfield June 20. Another seen and secured at Carns, June 28.

95. American Goldfinch. Abundant in small flocks and pairs all along the river.

96. House Sparrow. Abundant about every town or large ranch.

In addition to the birds listed we saw a large brown heron June 18 which we took to be an American Bittern, but could not thoroughly identify. We were told of Black-billed Magpies being shot as far east as Badger, regularly in the fall.

In addition to the prepared manuscript on the birds, Myron H. Swenk maintained a Diary and Ornithological Journal. His pen-written notebook details the day to day happenings of his journeys as the expedition floated the Niobrara River through eastern Brown and Keya Paha counties, and Holt, Boyd, and Knox counties. Entries were made on a day by day basis and begin with the departure from Lincoln. On Thursday, 12 June, Swenk and Pierce took the Fremont Elkhorn and Missouri Valley railroad to Long Pine.

After meeting Mr. Crawford in Long Pine, the trio spent the first night of camping, June 14, along the Niobrara 15 miles north of town. The area of the camp was visited the next few days. But after only two days their transportation for the river was delivered. The "boat arrived this afternoon but leaks badly." Eventually the mornings of the 23rd and the 24th were spent "repairing" and putting in place "a false bottom" on the boat.

The night the boat was fixed was to bring a recurring event for the rest of the journey to Niobrara. On the night of 24 June "a storm came up and blew down our tent." On the afternoon of the following day, the group start the float down the river "in our boat." It "rained and hailed" again that night. On Thursday, it was also "rainy with an opposing wind which kept blowing us out of the channel. We pitched (the) tent (at 11 a.m.) and, exhausted and sleepy, we slept until 3 p.m., had dinner and went to town."

Usually a member of the group would make a visit to a nearby town every few days. Pierce went once for "medicine for poison ivy sores." Other reasons were to pick up and send mail, to cash warrants, and Swenk once got "a shave and a hair cut."

The days were mostly devoted to forays to collect insects and observe birds. Some afternoons would involve preserving bird specimens, pinning entomological material or "loading shells and preparing for our collecting work." Fishing and loafing around were times of relaxation. Sometimes the men would play cards in the evening.

As the miles and days passed by, the weather included more rain, and some hot summer days until 3 July. "Today occurred a great catastrophe. A fierce storm came up, the end of a 'twister', and about demolished everything. We are now lodged in a farmer's house and expect to return home as soon as possible. We are in a 'fix' if we ever were."

The entry for the next day reads;

Friday, July 4-1902

"Today being Independence Day we were supposed to have a holiday, but the greater part of the day was spent fixing up our wet goods. In the afternoon we went to Carns and in the evening to a dance out in the country, getting back about 3 o'clock."

Carns was visited again on Saturday. On the last day of the holiday weekend the men "... went to Riley's place to see his rattlesnake cure. On the way the Red-headed Woodpecker was noted for the first time along a fence. The Dickcissels were seen. (Ferruginous) Roughleg (also) seen. We got a rattler with one rattle and a button and then another with 9 or 10 and a button. We put nooses around their head and choked the big one to death. On our return we found another immense one and the two dogs attacked it and were bitten. Riley administered his cure and it seems to work fine. I (Swenk) left at 6 o'clock, the boys remaining to note further developments. They returned late and reported the dogs still living."



Despite earlier comment about returning to Lincoln, Pierce and Swenk were the smaller group that remained on the expedition after "they received a letter from Prof. (Bruner on July 7) asking us to stay." Messrs. Crawford did however return home.

Swenk and Pierce then stayed in the Carns region for several day. On Wednesday, July 30, it "rained all last night — severe electrical storm." Thursday "we prepared things for going further down the river." Professor Bruner joined the two remaining original men on Friday, 1 August. "It (had) rained very hard last night again. The roads were all under water."

For the next week the group especially noted the variety of migrating shorebirds along the river as the boat floated on. They would camp at a suitable site on the river bank. Not every day meant travel on the river. August 3 was spent at a temporary camp below the Simpson Bridge, talking and eating. Near Badger and 30 miles above Niobrara were the next three night camping spots.

Then, "Friday, August 8-1902 (was Swenk's) birthday. We broke camp at 8:30 and started down river. Had excellent way most of the time, but a storm came up at noon and it rained and blew a great deal. We were soaked in the cold rain, but before it stopped, we started on again and came to a ferryboat at 4 o'clock, and stopped. We made 10 miles or so, and are now 12 miles by land and 20 by water from Niobrara . . . at the ferry there was a small hovel and the ferryman told us we might stay there one night if we wished. As it seemed ready to pur, we stopped. The place was infested by fleas and no one slept. After morning at last came, we got up and on."

Miserable conditions continued to plague the expedition even until the end of the 100 mile float trip. On the second to the last day of camping at Niobrara "a terrible storm came up, but not much wind. Winds started at 3 o'clock and it kept us busy all the time keeping our tent up. (We) went to town again tonight and got wet coming back."

The last days in the river valley were spent collecting insects and observing birds in the immediate vicinity of Niobrara. Swenk also "cleaned up" after the journey, "played tennis," "went over to see a dance," and "watched some ball playing." Typical summer pastimes even in present days.

The final day in the field it "commenced raining" so Pierce and Swenk returned to their quarters to pack. The group attended a party that night but later on left for Lincoln at 3 o'clock in the morning. They "arrived in Lincoln at noon (on) Friday August 15, thus ending the expedition." Swenk ended his journal with "Finis."

The manuscript "Notes on the Birds of the Lower Niobrara" was found in a file cabinet of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union (N.O.U.) library in Nebraska Hall of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. This material was probably originally used by Swenk to present a paper on the "Birds of the Niobrara Valley" to the N.O.U. on 24 January 1903 in Lincoln (mentioned in *Nebraska Bird Review* 23:30) The cover page had written on it that the paper was prepared for the 1902, then 1907 edition of the Proceedings of the N.O.U. It however never appeared in a printed form. So the nomenclature and species status has been updated and the paper presented in the same manner as Swenk prepared it. It provides a valuable record of the birds that were present in the lower valley of the unique Niobrara Valley at the turn of the century. The personal journal that provided additional background is in the collection of Swenk material kept at the Museum Library on the fourth floor of Nebraska Hall.

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